1   A method for creating electronic gift certificates involving at least one computer, is created from electronically signing data representing a monetary value, an expiration date, the name of the recipient, serial number, currency type or any other relevant data using a public private key encryption algorithm.

2   The method of claim 1 wherein said encryption algorithm is based on the public key infrastructure (PKI) standard including such algorithms as RSA public key encryption from RSA Security Inc.

3   The method of claim 1 wherein said data is sent to a reviewer as an electronic file or data stream or any other convenient means of packaging data, to be reviewed for accuracy after which said reviewer having determined the information to be accurate uses reviewers own private key, electronically sign said data.

4   The method of claim 3 wherein said signed data is sent to the Issuer where said data is again reviewed for accuracy before said Issuer using his or her private key generates and electronically signs or encrypts each electronic gift certificates.

5   The method of claim 4 wherein said reviewer or Issuer may include a person or computerized system.

6   The method of claim 4 wherein said certificates are distributed to recipients by various means including as an attachment in an email, downloaded form a web server or downloaded from a web server using a link in an email to locate the certificate.

7   The method of claim 6 wherein said recipients present said certificates electronically to designated vendors as payment for goods or services.

8   The method of claim 7 where said vendors use the public key of said certificate Issuer, verifies the authenticity of said certificates before providing goods or service.

9   The method of claim 8 wherein said vendors certificate verification includes checking the content and format of the decrypted output of said electronic gift certificate after decrypting it with the issuers public key.

10   The method of claim 9 wherein certificates passing said verification is redeemed before being submitted to the certificate issuer for reimbursement.

11   The method of claim 10 wherein said issuer will reimburse said vendors only if said certificate passes verification using the Issuers public key.

12   The method of claim 4 wherein said issuer using the public key of said reviewer verify that the data was signed by said reviewer and has not been altered, before said issuer is allowed to generate any electronic gift certificates.

13   The method of claim 1 wherein said electronic gift certificates utilizes the world wide web consortium (W3C) organization electronic signature XML specification as one means of encapsulating the electronic gift certificate.

14   The method of claim 13 wherein said XML specification is modified sufficiently to accommodate the additional data elements needed in an electronic gift certificate.

15   The method of claim 4 wherein the public key of said Issuer is distributed by secure means including encrypting said public key with a password, to relevant parties including vendors or computer systems, thereby providing said parties the ability to verify electronic gift certificates issued by said Issuer.

16   The method of claim 1 wherein savings from any unredeemed or expired gift certificates are retained by the certificate issuer.

17 The method of claim 4 whereby the certificate issuer establishes sufficient credit with vendors where certificates will be redeemed to cover the cost of redeemed certificates before the vendors are reimbursed.

18 The method of claim 5 wherein said certificate issuers and said reviewer may have their responsibilities combined thereby requiring the use of one set of public private key pair.

19 The method of claim 1 wherein said certificate may be used as an electronic rebate check.

20 The method of claim 4 wherein said certificate may include a password whereby software can be used to force the certificate recipient to enter said password before said certificate can be presented to any vendor for redemption.